



# Photoshop Mastery

Taking Photoshop to the next level

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

## From Deletion to Delight

Photoshop's Blending Options sliders, Background Eraser, and Extract command are great for removing the backgrounds on images. You can make them even more useful, however, if you learn how to convert the result into a Layer Mask and then use the advantages of masks to further refine and polish your image.

You can hide areas of your image based on how bright they are by choosing Layer>Layer Style>Blending Options and then messing around with the sliders at the bottom of the dialog box that appears. To get even more control, hold Option (PC: Alt) to split the sliders. Once you get the general result you're looking for, it's not very easy to make small refinements to the image—unless you know how to convert what you've got into a Layer Mask.

To convert the blending sliders into a Layer Mask, first hide all of the other layers in the document by Option-clicking (PC: Alt-clicking) on the Eye icon of the layer that has the sliders applied to it. Now, create a new layer and with that layer active, type Shift-Option-Command-E (PC: Shift-Alt-Control-E) to merge a duplicate of the visible layers into the layer that's active. To get a selection of the area that's visible, hold the Command key (PC: Control key) and click on the name of the layer that used to be empty. Then to transform that selection into a Layer Mask, drag the active layer to the Trash, click on the layer that has the sliders applied to it, and choose Layer>Add Layer Mask>Reveal Selection. That's good, but the only problem is that we now have both the sliders and the Layer Mask active on one layer when we only need one or the other. So, choose Layer>Layer Style>Blending Options and move the sliders back to their default positions.

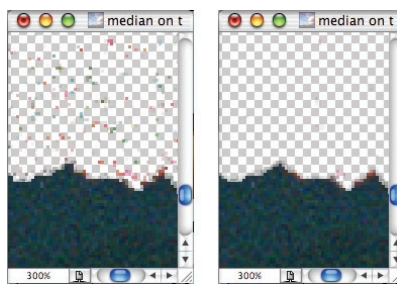
Now, before I show you how to refine your image by messing with the Layer Mask, let's take a look at how to convert what the Extract command and Background Eraser produce into a Layer Mask.

If you think you'll want to convert either of those features into a Layer Mask,

then be sure to duplicate the layer you want to apply things to before you start using the Background Eraser or Extract command. Once you've successfully removed the background using one of those features, do the following to convert the result into a Layer Mask.

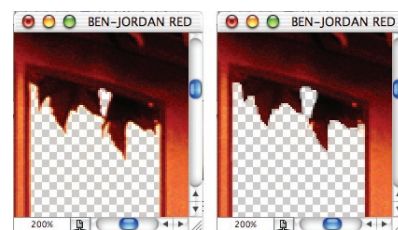
Select the subject of the photo by Command-clicking (PC: Control-clicking) on the layer that has the background removed. Now that you have your selection, throw away the layer you just clicked on and switch to the duplicate layer you created earlier. To get the mask, choose Layer>Add Layer Mask>Reveal Selection.

If you forgot to duplicate the layer first, or you didn't figure out that you'd



Left: Image before applying Median; Right: After

like a Layer Mask until after you'd already removed the background, then do the following: Command-click (PC: Control-click) on the layer you're working on and then choose Layer>Add Layer Mask>Reveal Selection. Then, to get the empty parts of the layer back (but have them still hidden by the mask), type Command-~ (PC: Control-~) to make the layer active instead of the mask, choose Edit>Fill, set the Use pop-up menu to History, and then click OK. (This will only work if you haven't changed the dimensions or color mode of your document since you opened it.)



Left: Image before Minimum; Right: After

Okay, now that you know how to convert things into a Layer Mask, let's look at what we can do with that mask to refine your image. First type Command-\ (PC: Control-\) to make the Layer Mask active. If too much of your image has been deleted, then grab the Brush tool and paint with white, which will bring areas back. Or, paint with black to hide areas. You can also lower the Opacity of the Brush tool to partially delete or bring back areas. If you'd like to have a softer edge in any area, then paint across that area with Photoshop's Blur tool.

If there's a rim around the edge of the image, then select the general area where you see the rim and choose Filter>Other>Minimum to push the edge into your image. You can also use the Maximum filter to push the edge in the opposite direction. If there are specks of image showing up in the background, then try choosing Filter>Noise>Median. In fact, any feature that works on a grayscale image can be used to refine this mask, all you have to do is experiment. ■

*Ben Willmore is founder of Digital Mastery, a Colorado-based training and consulting company that presents the national seminar tour of "Photoshop Mastery." He's also author of Photoshop 7 Studio Techniques. Check out the free Photoshop tips and tutorials at Ben's Web site, [www.digitalmastery.com](http://www.digitalmastery.com).*